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ABSTRACT

The Career Construct (CC) is a free-response instrument patterened after Kuhn's TST. It is introduced as a tool appropriate to the investigation of some symbolic interactionist questions focusing on the temproal and processual features of actor's courses of action. The main features of the CC are: (1) a free-response listing of 10 anticipated future life events; (2) Likert type items tapping respondent's attitudes toward each listed event along six different dimensions; and (3) four measures of CC "configurational patterns" (i.e., perceptions of conflict, complementarity, and means-ends relationships among listed events; and an importance ranking of events). A working hypothesis is inferred from Blumer's discussion of constructed actions: respondent's attitudes toward any given CC event will vary with that event's configurational locus in the CC. An exploratory analysis of this hypothesis, using CC protocols produced by 295 college students, is presented. It shows moderate to strong relationships between configurational locus of "graduation from college" on the one hand and subjective certainty of graduation on the other. It also shows that while control for sex does not affect the relationship involving the configurational factor of "conflict," there is a strong interaction effect for the relationship involving "complementarity." Complementarity does not influence subjective certainty of graduation for men, but for women, subjective certainty of graduation is increased when that is seen as complementary with other CC events. (Author/DB)

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THE CAREER CONSTRUCT: AN EXTENSION OF KUHN'S TWENTY STATEMENTS TEST

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The Career Construct (CC) is a free response instrument patterned after Kuhn's TST. It is introduced as a tool appropriate to the investigation of some symbolic interactionist questions focussing on the temporal and processual features of actor's courses of action.

The main features of the CC are: 1) A free response listing of 10 anticipated future life events; 2) Likert type items tapping respondent's attitudes toward each listed event along six different dimensions; 3) Four measures of CC "configurational patterns" (i.e., perceptions of conflict, complementarity and means-ends relationships among listed events; and an importance ranking of events.) It is suggested that the CC protocols are a phenomenal representation of one kind of prospective course of action.

Following Meltzer and Petras, some contrasts between the symbolic interactionist approaches of Blumer and Kuhn are described. It is suggested that TST protocols, primarily consisting of present oriented personal qualities, are appropriate to questions generated by Kuhn's atemporal perspective, but inappropriate for the investigation of questions deriving from Blumer's process-oriented conception of "constructed actions." The point is made that the investigation of constructed actions requires data pertaining to the actor's phenomenal representations of his prospective courses of action within the social environment.

A working hypothesis is inferred from Blumer's discussion of constructed actions: respondent's attitudes toward any given CC event will vary with that event's configurational locus in the CC.

An exploratory analysis of this hypothesis, using CC protocols produced by 295 college students is presented. It shows moderate to strong relationships between configurational locus of "graduation from collega" on the one hand and subjective certainty of graduation on the other. It also shows that while control for sex of respondent does not affect the relationship involving the configurational factor of "conflict," there is a strong interaction effect for the relationship involving "complementarity." For men, complementarity does not influence subjective certainty of graduation; for women, subjective certainty of graduation is increased when that event is seen as complementary with other CC events.

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The Career Construct (CC) is a free response instrument patterned after Kuhn's TST. (Kuhn and McPartland, 1954). It is introduced as an operationalized, quantifiable tool appropriate to the investigation of symbolic interactionist questions focussing on the temporal and processual features of actor's courses of action.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Recent surveys of the symbolic interactionist orientation (Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1969; Meltzer, 1964; Meltzer and Petras, 1970) suggest shared assumptions concerning the importance of four factors in human behavior:

1) The importance of the actor's phenomenal and symbolic representations of his internal and external environment.

2) The importance of the "self"--a reflexive treatment by the actor of himself as an object within his phenomenal environment.

3) The importance of the actor's social situation, and the "others" in that situation.

4) The importance of the temporal and processual features of the actor's courses of action and behavior.

Meltzer and Petras (1970), however, point to the existence of two conflicting orientations within the larger tradition: the Chicago school, following the lead of Herbert Blumer; and the Iowa school, following the tradition of Manfred Kuhn. They characterize the Chicago school as

favoring the analysis of the temporal and processual aspects of human action--and particularly of the manner in which "constructed" meanings serve to explain constantly developing courses of human action. The Iowa school, in contrast, is characterized as a more static approach, favoring the analysis of the manner in which a structurally stabalized "self" serves to explain human behavior patterns. In terms of the assumptions listed above, the Iowa school focusses on number 2, while the Chicago school focusses on number 4.

These differing assumptions are echoed in the contrasting views of the self taken by the two schools in their methodological positions. Blumer (1962) views the self primarily as a mechanism which actors use in constructing actions. He suggests that:

> "In declaring that the human being has a self, Mead had in mind chiefly that the human being can be the object of his own actions.
>
> "Mead regards this ability of the human being to act toward himself as the central mechanism with which the human being faces and deals with his world. This mechanism enables the human being to make indications to himself of things in his surroundings and thus to guide his actions by what he notes." (Blumer 1962:146)

In this view, the self might almost be a content-free "sounding board," important only as a mechanism in the construction of the constantly flowing stream of action. It does not possess important stable features or content which "cause" behavior.

In contrast, Kuhn viewed the self as "the individual's attitudes (plans of action) toward his mind and body, viewed as an object." (Hickman and Kuhn, 1956:46) In this view, the self is an operationally definable cluster of attitudes, with enough structure and stability to serve as the anchor for other attitudes, and thru these the cause of specific behaviors (Tucker, 1966).

These contrasting views lead to conflicting positions concerning the usefulness of operationalized and quantitative research procedures: Blumer suggests that such procedures are unable to capture the elusive temporal features of human action. Kuhn, on the other hand, developed the TST (Kuhn and McPartland, 1954) as a specifically operationalized and quantifiable instrument which could tap the phenomenal self, and provide data useful in the prediction of human behavior.

Gordon (1968) has shown that TST protocols are useful in the study of many important questions--including some involving variations in temporal perspective. It seems, however, that the responses to the TST stimulus item "Who am I?" do not appear appropriate for the exploration of questions generated by Blumer's process oriented conception of "constructed actions." This is so both in the sense that the TST responses seem to contain more qualities than actions and also in the sense that the present tense of the verb from in "Who am I?" seems to somewhat constrain temporal perspectives to the present tense. It would seem that the investigation of "constructed actions" requires data pertaining to the actor's phenomenal representations of his prospective courses of action.

THE INSTRUMENT

The CC shows both points of agreement with both the Iowa and Chicago positions. On the one hand, it is designed to provide information relevant to the study of process oriented constructed actions. On the other hand, Kuhn's basic technique of quantifying and operationalizing free response phenomenal representations is the method of study adopted.

The key stimulus item of the CC was chosen to elicit from the respondent a specifically temporal and action oriented set of responses:

> "Please use the following ten spaces to list some important events which you think <u>will</u> happen in your future, and some important events which you think <u>might</u> possibly happen in your future life. Try to list both kinds of events. You do not need to put them in any order--simply write them in as they occur to you."
>
> Please....indicate how old you expect to be at the time of each of the events you listed."

The following list is a miscellaneous collection of not atypical responses from a group of 401 college introductory sociology students:

Get a car	(19)
Final exams	(20)
Get drafted	(21)
Move away from home	(21)
Graduation	(22)
Law School	(23)
Get Married	(25)
Have children	(28)
Get rich	(45)
Illness	(60)
Retire	(65)
Death	(100)

These protocols consist then of free response, self-relevant representations which are in Turner's phrase (1968), "time oriented." They lodge the self in becoming rather than in present states of being, and they make it possible to deal with the respondent's conceptions of his self as engaged in an ongoing course of action. They find their most precise theoretical locus in Blumer's (1962:147) discussion of "constructed actions."

> "....<u>action is constructed</u> or built up....Whatever the action in which he is engaged, the human individual proceeds by pointing out to himself the divergent things which have to be taken into account in the course of his action. He has to note what he wants to do and how he is to do it; he has to point out to himself the various conditions which may be instrumental to his action and those which may obstruct his action....

> The human individual pieces together and guides his action by taking account of different things and interpreting their significance for his prospective action." (Italics Supplied)

Inherent in the last sentence of the above quotation is an important working hypothesis: an actor's attitude (guidance toward or away from) any given action will be a function of the relationship which that action has to other events in the prospective course of action. Two as yet undescribed features of the CC provide data relevant to this hypothesis.

Data concerning "guidance toward or away from" any given action is provided by the respondent's indications of attitudes toward each CC event. Six different Likert type items dealing with importance, desirability, certainity, control, difficulty, and effort are used to tap attitudes. (Respondents are also asked to indicate their perceptions of the attitude of significant others toward each event. The use of these items will be discussed in forthcoming work.)

Data relevant to the relationship of any given CC event to other events in the prospective course of action is provided by responses to a set of items eliciting respondent's perceptions of the configurational patterns, or cognitive structuring, of the CC. I.e., respondents are asked to specify:

1) The three most "important" CC events, listed in their order of importance.

2) Two pairs of "conflicting events."

3) Two pairs of "complementary events."

4) Two sets consisting of one "means event" and one"goal event" per set.

Given these kinds of CC materials, the working hypothesis cited above can be further specified as follows: respondent's attitudes toward any given CC event will be a function of that event's configurational locus in the CC. The remaining paragraphs of this paper will present an exploratory analysis of this hypothesis, in terms of configurational locus of "college graduation" on the one hand, and attitude toward "college graduation" on the other.

EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS

Respondents are 295 introductory sociology students from a California State University Campus located in an upper middle class suburban area of Southern California. They are the 74 percent of an initial group of 401 students who included college graduation in their CC protocols. Findings concerning the relationship of the attitudinal variable of certainty, on the one hand, and the two configurational variables of conflict and complementarity on the other hand, are presented below.

The measure of "certainty" is an item asking "How certain do you feel that this event will actually occur?" Five Likert type response categories ranging from "extremely certain" to "not at all certain" were provided. Responses were dichotomized, with 39 percent(114) of the respondents indicating they were "extremely certain" that the event of college graduation would occur, and the remainder indicating lesser degrees of certainty.

The measure of perceived conflict between college graduation and other CC events was derived from free response items asking respondents to

specify two pairs of events which conflicted with one another. If college degree appeared in either or both conflicting pairs of events, the respondent was classified as one for whom graduation occupied a position of CC conflict. Twenty six percent (76) of respondents indicated that graduation from college held such a position of conflict within their CC.

A comparable measure of complementarity--asking for two pairs of events which "complement or go especially well together"--resulted in 52 percent (154) of respondents indicating that college graduation occupied a position of complementarity within their CC.

Having thus restricted the analysis to the relationship between configurational locus of, and attitude toward college graduation, cross tabulational analysis revealed the following findings: The relationship between conflict and certainty is strong and negative, showing a gamma value of $-.50$ ($p = .001$). Given a moderate relationship between sex and certainty (Gamma = .30; $p = .05$)--with males more certain of college graduation than females--a control for sex is introduced. It results in a very slight interaction effect: i.e., among males the strength of the relationship is changed to a gamma value of $-.46$ ($p = .05$); and among females the resulting gamma value is increased to $-.53$ ($p = .05$).

The relationship between complementarity and certainty is small and positive, with a gamma value of $+.25$ ($p = .20$). In this case, however, the control of sex shows a strong impact. Among males the relationship essentially disappears (Gamma = +.02; p = N.S.); while among females it increases to a moderate gamma value of $+.37$ ($p = .05$).

Conclusion:

The exploratory findings cited above are taken as validation of the working hypothesis inferred from Blumer's discussion of constructed action: actor's attitudes toward any given action will be a function of the relationship which that action has to other events in the prospective course of action. They are also taken as an indication that the CC--an operationalized and quantifiable instrument--can be used to explore some of the implications of that temporal and process oriented theory.

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